

INSPIRATIONS OF TRADITIONAL HINDU TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE IN THE BIRLA MANDIR IN RENUKOOT

The Renukoot (Reṇukūṭ) Birla mandir, dedicated to Śiva in the aspect of Reṇukeśvara Mahādeva, was founded in 1972 by the Birla (Bīrlā) family. It is located in one of the Birlas' industrial towns — Renukoot, in the south-eastern part of Uttar Pradesh where HINDALCO Industries Limited (the aluminium factory) has operated since 1962. The region started attracting investors and industrialist after a dam was constructed on the river Rihand¹⁾. It was inaugurated in 1960 by the then prime minister of India – Jawaharlal Nehru. He tried to encourage every guest and businessman who came there, among them Ghanshyamdas Birla, to invest in the region. Indeed, the Birlas decided to locate one of their main enterprises here — the Hindalco (Hindustan Aluminium Corporation) factory. It may be assumed that the temple was planned to serve as the main shrine for the Hindu community living and working in this area. At the same time, it is one of the attractions for visitors to the region. It must, however, be mentioned that if at all we consider it as a kind of 'tourist' place, it is only so for local (Indian) visitors²⁾, since it is located beyond the main tourist routes and is rather difficult to reach. The

¹⁾ Kudaisya (2003: 334–335).

²⁾ We may find few references to the temple on some websites informing about this area and the attractions one may consider while visiting it, e.g. Tripadvisor [https://www.tripadvisor.com/Tourism-g6867718-Renukoot_Uttar_Pradesh-Vacations.html; access: 22.04.2016] or <http://renukootsonebhadra.blogspot.com/2013/07/renukoot-attractions.html> [access: 22.04.2016]. There are also some videos on YouTube.

road is poor and full of trucks travelling to and from the Hindalco factory and other companies, so it takes nearly five hours to get there from Varanasi.

The Renukoot temple belongs to the group of Birla temples built far from the main cities or the major Hindu pilgrimage centres³⁾, in the newly established industrial towns that sprung up near the Birlas' factories. We may also enumerate among them such places as Shahad (textile industry), Salav/Alibag (steel processing, cellulose) in Maharashtra, Brajrajnagar (paper mill, now closed) in Orissa and Amlai (paper mill) in Madhya Pradesh. In Renukoot G.D. Birla founded the biggest Asian aluminium company that went on to become one of the major metal producers in the world.

The Renukeśvara temple is obviously one of many Hindu temples in Renukoot⁴⁾. It is located in the HINDALCO Colony. Some Hindus visit it for morning or evening prayers or sometimes they bring along members of their families from other parts of the country. During religious festivals, such as Mahāśivarātri, it is also a popular place of pilgrimage for inhabitants of the region. At that time, special ceremonies take place in the temple premises, as could be observed during my fieldwork visit in February 2014. There were special constructions built around the temple, such as a stage and assembly hall⁵⁾ with a marquee situated behind the temple or wooden construction covering small *linga* shrine in the garden area. There was also a temporary metal fence around the main building. Otherwise, the temple is rather quiet and empty while during the day it remains closed from 10.30 AM till 4.00 PM. It opens at 5 AM and closes at 9 PM. The *ārti* takes place twice a day in the morning and evening at 7 o'clock (6.30 in Winter). There is one priest (*pūjārī*) who performs the service in the temple, although there were not many worshippers while I visited it. Some people were employed to clean the area after the Mahāśivarātri ceremony which had taken place the day before. It seemed that many people come there to relax and walk in the garden surrounding the temple. We may assume that in Renukoot itself there are only few recreational places, so this shrine and adjacent garden could serve as one of these, as they are beautifully situated, peaceful, quiet and clean. In fact,

³⁾ For example New Delhi, Kolkata, Mathura, etc.

⁴⁾ In town there are also other Hindu temples dedicated to: Radhā Kṛṣṇa, Vaiṣṇodevī, Jvalā Devī, Vandevī, Hanuman, Rām.

⁵⁾ The information on the entrance of this construction said that there was a story telling event lasting for seven days – 21.2.2014–27.2.2014. The reciter was *paṇḍit* Uma Shankar ji Sharma and the story was based on the Rāma's legend.

all Birla mandirs, unless they are located in confined areas, are surrounded by greenery and this condition seems to be very important while choosing a place to establish a temple.

The founders of the temple, which is commonly referred to the Birla Mandir rather than the Śiva Reṇukeśvara mandir, belong to one of the richest and most influential families in India. The Birlas used to be merchants; now they are businessmen and industrialists. They founded over twenty new Hindu temples, mainly in the northern and central states of India. This activity started in the 1930s, when Baldeodas and his son Jugalkishore committed themselves to building a 'proper modern' Hindu temple for New Delhi (now mostly recognised as the Lakṣmīnārāyaṇ or Birla mandir, opened in 1939). This was not, however, the first activity of this kind, since Seth Shivrinarain – the grandfather of Ghanshyamdas Birla (the main founder of the Birla mandirs) – restored an old temple in Pilani, the Birlas' hometown in Rajasthan. It is thus obvious that the family supported already existing temples, some of which even stood in ruins. There is no complete list of all the sacral objects as well as other constructions that could have been founded, renovated or just maintained with the financial support of the Birlas. In various sources one may find information about approximately forty projects⁶⁾. Foundation work primarily involves the construction of new temples such as the one in Renukoot. There are over twenty newly founded Birla mandirs and all of them are the subject of the author's research⁷⁾. Due to their architectural features, they may be divided into two main groups – the first one may include all those temples that represent the distinctive modern style starting with the New Delhi mandir designed by Sris Chandra Chatterjee. This was one of the projects that aimed to create a standard for a Hindu shrine according to the ideas of the Modern Indian Architectural Movement, as Chatterjee was one of its major initiators⁸⁾.

The other group consists of temples constructed in eclectic styles; they imitate famous temples and their sculptural decoration and/or the regional styles of Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan. Some of them tend to be almost an exact copy of some excellent examples of Hindu sacral architecture,

⁶⁾ See Kudaisya (2003: 393).

⁷⁾ The research is carried out within the framework of the 'Opus 5' programme of the National Science Centre [UMO-2013/09/B/HS1/02005] together with my two colleagues – Prof. Marta Kudelska and Dr. Agata Świerżowska.

⁸⁾ Lang, Desai, Desai (1997: 133–134).

such as the temples in Konark (the Birla Vivasvan-Sūrya temple in Gwalior, dated to 1988) or Khajuraho (the Sarasvatī temple in Pilani constructed in 1960). Thus, in architectural forms, these Birla temples may use elements of a different origin, freely assembled according to the requirements. Sculpture decoration, mostly concentrated on the exterior walls, is also incorporated in this way.

The Śiva temple in Renukoot, belonging to the second group, was founded by G.D. Birla himself. It is a small temple inspired by the North Indian styles of sacral architecture where we may mainly observe traces of the most famous Orissan style, such as the temples in Bhuvaneśvar.

The Birla mandir is located on a hill, in a quiet, green neighbourhood. To access it one has to climb stairs forming kind of a garden terrace with a Sūrya chariot in the middle (Fig. 1). In front of the main entrance there is an open, pillared shrine with *śivaliṅga*. The sandstone temple is situated on a tall fenced platform; access to it is via an ornamental gate. On the top, on both sides of the main entrance, there are statues of G.D. Birla and his wife, as well as Braj Mohan Birla, G.D.'s brother. In front of the temple there is an open Nandin shrine – a bull is facing the temple main entrance⁹⁾.

The Reṇukeśvara temple has a very simple structure: an open pillared portico, a main hall on a low plinth and a cella section surmounted with a tower (Fig. 2). The main hall may be accessed from three sides. Its marble interior is rather simple, the wall decoration consisting of figural relieves in golden framings and pilasters in the hall corners as well as on both sides of all the doors (Fig. 3). In the niches on each side of the main sanctum entrance, there are representations of Hanumat and Gaṇeśa. They follow the standard iconographic pattern, hence Hanumat is shown in a dynamic posture (with his left leg forward and resting on a hill with Lakṣmaṇa lying wounded at his foot) holding a mace and the Droṇagiri mountain. Gaṇeśa is depicted four-armed, sitting on a lotus in *vāmālitāsana*, holding *laḍḍu*, a battleaxe, *aṅkuśa* and making the *abhaya* gesture. At Gaṇeśa's foot there is a rat – his *vāhana*.

In the middle part of the cella, on a high pedestal there is the Umā-Maheśvara-Nandin group, flanked by much smaller images of their sons – Kārttikeya and Gaṇeśa (bottom), as well as the gods Brahmā and Viṣṇu (top). This form of Śiva is depicted as seated with his consort. She sits on his left. He

⁹⁾ The Glorious 90 years (1983: 74–75).

holds a trident, a lotus and a serpent, and one hand puts on her arm. Umā also puts one hand on Śiva's shoulder and holds a mirror in the other (Fig. 4).

Brahmā and Viṣṇu, shown at the top in a sitting posture, are four-armed and hold their standard attributes: a ladle, a vessel, a manuscript, *abhaya* (Brahmā); and a mace, a lotus, a wheel and a conch (Viṣṇu). Kārttikeya stands on the left at Śiva's foot; he is four-armed and holds a vessel, a spear and *daṇḍa* or *aṅkuśa* or *vajra*¹⁰, and makes the *abhaya* gesture with the remaining hand. Gaṇeśa's representation on the Umā's side follows the type described above, although here he is depicted in a standing posture.

The style of all the figural representations inside the temple is very clumsy; in addition, they are covered with very bright pink, green, blue, yellow, silver and golden paintwork. They are all inscribed – the information given here is a salutation to the god, consecration date, etc. It is worth considering that, except for the Hanumat and Gaṇeśa images, all the representations on the wall of the *maṇḍapa* are female. There are eight goddesses shown in a standing position:

- A. on the left side of the cella: 1. the goddess of the Gaṅgā river standing on *makara*, holding a lotus flower; 2. Sāvitrī four-armed and four-headed, holding a rosary, a manuscript, a vessel and a lotus flower (this iconography corresponds with the standard Brahmā type); 3. Sarasvatī holding a vīṇā in her front arms and a rosary and manuscript in her back arms; 4. Sītā, with her right hand in the *abhaya* gesture and with the left holding a flower;
- B. on the right side of the cella: 5. four-armed Lakṣmī in the *vīra* type¹¹ holding lotuses in both back hands, making the *abhaya* and *kaṭyavalambita* gestures; 6. eight-armed Durgā standing against a tiger, making the *abhaya* gesture, holding a bow, a sword, a discus, a conch, a mace, a trident and a lotus; 7. Gāyatrī – five-faced and ten-armed, making *abhaya* and *varada* gestures, holding a mace, a lotus, a round object (?), a discus, a conch, *aṅkuśa*, a whip and a rosary; 8. Yamunā (Jamnā) holding a vessel, with a turtle at her side.

Below the representation of each goddess there is a fragment of a devotional song (*bhajan*) in Hindi. This is very odd since the eight images that were chosen here are female while the inscriptions that we read below have nothing in common with those representations. The song is addressed to god

¹⁰ It is hard to discern since the objects are very tiny.

¹¹ Rajeshwari (1989: 22).

Viṭhobā – one of Viṣṇu’s aspects. He was only worshipped originally in the Maharastra region, then became popular in other parts of India, as one of Viṣṇu’s incarnations. It must be remembered, however, that the Renukoot temple is dedicated to Śiva, hence in the sanctum there are idols of Umā and Maheśvara.

In the prayer, the Viṭhobā’s devotee says:

1. [Under Gaṅgā’s image:] ‘The Blessed One¹²⁾ solely became my god and my teacher. He fulfils all my wishes, and he summons me at the end. Standing behind and in front of his devotees he looks after them and keeps all threats away from them, still offering them a share in riches. Having shown them the way, he puts them on the path to liberation.’
2. [Under Sāvitrī’s image:] ‘Oh, people! Do not be anxious that much and do not care for celestial matters only. The reason is that Nārāyaṇa is always a helper to his devotees and protects them. If you want to address any word to him, there is no need to prepare a speech using words. Stay fearless and speechless.’
3. [Under Sarasvatī’s image:] ‘Having given up affection and anger for the sake of the Blessed One, I have kept/put my affection to his steps. My bodily state has gone. Who should now turn back? I have already kicked off the happiness of prosperity and fulfilment, but then in this natural world, who cares about happiness. I am a servant of Viṭhobā (Viṣṇu). I have tasted the bite of Brahmāṇḍa¹³⁾.’
4. [Under Sītā’s image:] ‘The highest Lord has helped us (given us a hand), that is why we are void of worries. Our mind¹⁴⁾ does not wander anywhere. All senses are pleased. Having left the whole concupiscence I take the name of Viṭhobā (Viṣṇu).’
5. [Under Lakṣmī’s image:] ‘I find all happiness at the feet of Viṭhobā (Viṣṇu), that is why there is no other desire in my consciousness. Except for the Blessed One there is nobody in my consciousness. I have no care left about liberation.’

¹²⁾ Since few words of a similar meaning were used in Hindi original, I have differentiated between them translating *bhagvān* as ‘Blessed One’, *dev* as ‘god’ and *īśvar* as ‘Lord’. I want to thank Prof. Kudelska for her remarks on this.

¹³⁾ Literally Brahmā’s egg – the universe, world.

¹⁴⁾ In the original – *man*. I decided to distinguish between *man* – translated as ‘mind’ and *cit* as ‘consciousness’ (in the following verses).

6. [Under Durgā's image:] 'The saints have left their footprints in my consciousness. Now time cannot bundle me. All my disparity became bleak. Now inside and outside there is only Lord. That is why mind became fearless. I feel no fear even in dreams.'
7. [Under Gāyatrī's image:] 'I eat and drink, take and give. However I save and spend in your name only. Now all fuss is finished. Having put my whole burden on your head I became void of concerns.'
8. [Under Yamunā's image:] 'Nārāyaṇ is a helper to hold your patience. He neither allows his servants to bear any pain, nor he allows worrying. Let us pray in bliss and sing about Hari's values.'

On the pedestal of Hanumat's representation there is information about the day of foundation/consecration. It took place in the Vaiśākha month of the lunar Hindu calendar, on the sixth day of its bright half (Thursday). This corresponds to 18 May 1972. The main founder (*saṁsthāpaka*) was G.D. Birla, chairman of the Hindustan Aluminium Corporation, Renukoot, Mirzapur. Further, on Gaṇeśa's image pedestal there is a comparable notification with some additional information about the year of the Vikram Saṁvat (era) — 2029, when this consecration took place. On the pedestal of the main idols of the temple — Umā and Maheśvara — the above information is repeated¹⁵⁾.

This colourful and rather clumsy sculptural decoration of the interior is at odds with the highly elegant and well-designed carvings covering the outside walls. The sculptural decoration forms four distinct groups: 1. representations of gods and goddesses; 2. figures of *apsarasas*, *suranāyikas* or *surasundarīs*¹⁶⁾, dancers/musicians, *navagrahas* and *dvārapālas*; 3. figural decorative motifs such as *vyālas* (or *śārdūlas*), *nāginīs*, *vidyādhara*s, *makaras*, elephants and lions, as well as gargoyles; 4. ornamental, mostly floral motifs. We may observe that the decoration is extremely rich and diverse, while it is worth mentioning that some parts of the temple construction are densely covered with carvings (e.g. the sanctum *śikhara*), whereas on other surfaces the figures are more sparsely allocated (as seen in the main *maṇḍapa*).

The gods and goddesses are distributed in five different areas: A. the middle part of the *śikhara* wall that forms niches (*rathikā*) on three sides with standing couples (Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva with their consorts); B. corresponding square niches above the divine couples, where seated representations of

¹⁵⁾ At the entrance to the temple premises, downstairs, there is also a board with the information about the temple dedication and the date of consecration.

¹⁶⁾ Varadpande (2007: 94–95).

the main gods (Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva) appear; C. round finials (*maṇḍalas*) at the top of the three main hall entrances, where various dancing Śiva forms are situated; D. the corners of *ratha* in the *śikhara* section where *dikpālas* and some minor emanations of gods are depicted, e.g. Agni as the god of the Southeast quarter (Fig. 5); E. lintels, e.g. Gajalakṣmī above the main entrance; F. figural niches in the lower sections of the *śikhara*, in a vertical line with representations A. and B. It should be noticed that the depictions of deities are rather standard in terms of their postures, attributes or ornaments and so will not be discussed here. Their style imitates the Orissa regional style. Also the iconographic models employed here seem to be inspired mostly by this region. The same rule applies to other minor gods (D., E., F.).

The group of images described above is supplemented with numerous figures of beautiful, charming females often referred to as *apsarasas* or *surasundarīs*, depicted here solo or in couples. Some of them are shown in various dancing postures; some play instruments, while others are engaged in daily activities (such as putting on make up or jewellery) or they merely stand in graceful poses. There are also a few representations that may be compared to the *śālabhañjikā* type. They are distributed in all rows of the *śikhara*, as well as on the walls of the main hall. Many of them are particularly interesting, as they seem to imitate figures of the Khajuraho or Bhuvaneśvar temples. For example, there is a representation of a lady captured while plucking a thorn from her foot¹⁷⁾. This is one of the most recognisable figures when it comes to Hindu temple decoration. The female images will be discussed below in a further analysis.

Among other images carved on the Renukoot temple walls there are *navagrahas* located above all three entrances. Below, in the lower section of pilasters framing the doors there are *dvārapālas* flanking all three doorways to the shrine *maṇḍapa*. All of them are of the *śaiva* type. Additionally, there are numerous figural decorative motifs such as *śārdūlas* — placed mostly in the *salilāntaras*, recesses of the *śikhara* section. Beautifully depicted *nāginīs* coil around the columns flanking the *rathas* on three sides of the sanctum tower. They also form *nāgaśakhā* — the ornamental jamb of the main entrance. Other images are carved in various places — for example, *vidyādhara*s flying over the deities' representations such as *dikpālas*, *makaras* forming gargoyles

¹⁷⁾ This female type is one of the most common and recognisable. The representation of the *surasundarīs* may be compared for example with the one depicted on the Kandāriyā Mahādeva temple walls in Khajurāho (Deva 1990: 261, 455, 482).

(*makara-praṇālī*) or elephants and lions depicted at the column bases and as crownings on the *maṇḍapa* roof and on *śikhara*.

Taking all the architectural and sculptural elements together, we may observe that the closest original monument serving as a source of inspiration for the designers of the Renukoot Birla mandir is the Rājārānī temple in Bhuvaneśvar (Fig. 6) made of beautiful red sandstone. There are obviously some differences between these two, as in Rājārānī, for example, the portico section is less protruding. The shape of the pyramidal *maṇḍapa* roof and *śikhara* with clusters of smaller *rekha* sections have different curves. Furthermore, in lieu of the side doors there are pillared windows. The Rājārānī temple may be ranked among Orrisa's typical *jagmohana-rekhādeul* constructions and is dated to the early 11th CE¹⁸⁾. Therefore, some elements of sculptural decoration are missing, such as images of the main deities that were in the *deva-koṣṭhas* of the sanctum tower. Besides, it is clear that the finial sections above the *maṇḍapa* windows were reconstructed but not finished. There are still some grooves indicating the upcoming figures that used to be planned here, but for some reason were not executed. In the Renukoot temple, however, there are dancing Śiva representations in the *caitya* window-like finials. Still, the general plan of Rājārānī, as well as the distribution of all its architectural elements are copied in the Renukoot shrine.

The Rājārānī temple was dedicated to Śiva, as we may assume from the character of the exterior figural decoration, although now there is no image in the sanctum. The ornamental floral decoration of Rājārānī is more detailed and elegant, while in Renukoot we could observe a much simplified, even geometricized version of it. Still, when we pay the attention to the figures themselves, after examining only a few of them, we notice that they are comparable to the Rājārānī carvings. Many similarities of this kind may be spotted here — for example, a representation of the above mentioned gods, such as Agni (Fig. 7) or numerous female images (e.g. Fig. 8). Due to a lack of main images distributed originally in the niches of the tower, it is difficult to say whether they are repeated in Renukoot. Apart from that, almost all the sculptures are copied, even the *navagraha* panels over the *maṇḍapa* doors, tiny figures in the lowest section of *śikhara*'s lower part, or the leogryph-elephant-lion column bases.

In fact, only a few figures, among them the *surasundarīs*, dancers and musicians of the *maṇḍapa* wall that are the most noticeable, were derived from

¹⁸⁾ Donaldson (1987).

other sources, such as the Khajuraho shrines. In the Rājārānī temple there is no decoration on the walls of main hall, and so the Renukoot designers had to add something extra here in concordance with the overall concept.

The same relates to the interior decoration which cannot be analysed with reference to the Rājārānī temple, as there is no decoration inside this shrine. Nor are there any images preserved there in the main sanctum. Consequently, what we see inside is solely the invention of the Renukoot temple designers and that may explain the dissonance between the highly elegant, tasteful and well-designed exterior and the rather simplified, naive style of the interior sculptures. Still, it is fascinating that the decoration consists of various female representations. We may assume that among them were depicted the most important or popular and, on the contrary, not so obvious images of different manifestations of *devī* / personifications of *śakti*. All may be interpreted as various aspects of *Adya Śakti*. Lakṣmī here is in the benevolent form as a life-bestowing and life-increasing goddess. Further as a consort of Viṣṇu she appears in many *avatāras*; hence, in the Rāma story she accompanies him as Sītā, symbolising his transcendent power of delight inherent in fortune. Sītā is also shown in this group of *devī* aspects in the Renukoot mandir.

Durgā is one of the most recognisable *śakti* manifestations, depicted as the warrior goddess, a genuine symbol of divine forces.

Three goddesses depicted here are connected with water: Gaṅgā, Yamunā and Sarasvatī. Gaṅgā may be taken as a symbol of abundance. She is also related to Śiva, as he was the one who took the force of the first stream of the Gaṅgā when she fell from heaven upon the earth. The next river goddess here is Yamunā, also a deified river and sacred due to stories of Kṛṣṇa. The last one in this group — Sarasvatī — is not only an ancient river, mentioned as early as in the Vedas, but may also be considered as god Brahmā's *śakti*, a goddess of speech, knowledge and learning. According to *Brahmāpurāṇa*, she was created from *Adya Śakti*'s tongue. There is also one goddess here associated with speech — i.e. Gāyatrī who represents the most popular and important mantra protecting all beings, as well as the name of a Vedic metre. Therefore she symbolises Vedas in general. She is also known as Sarasvatī and Sāvitrī and a consort of Brahmā. All three goddesses together — Gāyatrī, Sarasvatī and Sāvitrī — represent the three presiding gods (Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Rudra) of the Gāyatrī mantra, chanted three times a day¹⁹⁾.

¹⁹⁾ Rajeshwari (1989: 8, 17, 18, 22–23, 27–29, 34–35, 48–49).

It is also important that in the main sanctum, the *śaiva* image that was chosen is of the Umā-Maheśvara type; thus, Śiva appears here with his *śakti* as well. This corresponds with the general character of the temple decoration, also with an Orissan prototype. There is one more essential aspect in the case of the Renukoot mandir — that is, the idea of inclusivism. The main deity of the temple is Śiva, but at the same time there is a place for other Hindu gods, and the only inscription that appears in the temple praises one of Viṣṇu's aspects. This shrine, following the main Birla initiative, represents their aspiration to include as many cults of Hinduism as possible. Furthermore, using the Rājārānī model, it makes clear reference to the tradition of Hindu temples that employed the *śakti* iconography. Even in parts that could not have been copied after the Rājārānī, such as the *maṇḍapa* walls, this general *śakti* thought seems to be evident. According to Desai's interpretation concerning the Khajuraho decoration: '*Surasundarīs* or *apsarās* (heavenly damsels) have their auspicious influence as *alāṅkāra* on the body of the temple with fertility symbolism suggested in their poses. From the point of view of the macrocosm, they could be Śaktis such as Vāmā and others who are the fifth *tattva*, Śuddha Vidyā-*tattva* in the ladder of manifestation/Evolution of the Universe helping the process of creation. Looked at from the point of view of Man, the microcosm, they are the powers who helped him in the process of reintegration. It is significant that the recently found Orissan text *Śilparatnakośa* treats the female figures of temple art as *upaśaktis*, associated goddesses assigned to the parts of the Śrīyantra.'²⁰⁾

To sum up, the Birla mandir in Renukoot may be included in the group that reveals an eclectic style with evident inspiration from the Orissa region. It is, like the Pilani or Gwalior temples, inspired by one of the most recognised and beautiful sacral foundations — in this case of the Rājārānī temple in Bhuvaneśvar. The Renukoot foundation does not strictly follow the Rājārānī design, although it copies the general architectural plan and repeats almost all the original elements of the sculptural decoration. It is one of the temples founded in an industrial environment, an act that could be viewed as falling under the auspices of corporate social responsibility²¹⁾. In Renukoot the Birlas decided to create and maintain a sacred space for the Hindu community in the vicinity of one of their factories.

²⁰⁾ Desai (1996: 157, 161).

²¹⁾ Singh (2010).

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Fig. 1. The Renukoot Birla mandir – terrace garden area, photo Agnieszka Staszczyk



Fig. 2. The Renukoot Birla mandir – overall view, photo Agnieszka Staszczyk



Fig. 3. The Renukoot Birla mandir – interior of the main hall, photo Agnieszka Staszczyk



Fig. 4. The Renukoot Birla mandir – the śaiva group in the sanctum, photo Agnieszka Staszczyk



Fig. 5. The Renukoot Birla mandir – the god Agni, photo Agnieszka Staszczyk



Fig. 6. The Rājārānī temple in Bhuvaneśvar, overall view, photo Agnieszka Staszczyk



Fig. 7. The Rājārānī temple in Bhuvaneśvar, the niche with the god Agni, photo Agnieszka Staszczuk

▼ Fig. 8 (a, b). Comparison of the female representations in the Rājārānī temple and the Renukoot Birla mandir, photo Agnieszka Staszczuk



◀ a

b ▶

